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Nicaragua's Development as a Marxist-Leninist State

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A Research Paper

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Nicaragua's Development as a Marxist-Leninist StateSummary

A detailed comparison of five Third-World Marxist-Leninist states--Cuba, South Yemen, Ethiopia, Angola, and Grenada (before October 1983)--demonstrates a common pattern in the consolidation of power and development of ties to the USSR and its surrogates. When viewed in the context of this established pattern, the Nicaraguan revolution is clearly following a Marxist-Leninist path; the Sandinistas have taken most of the same steps taken by the five other Marxist-Leninist regimes early in their stages of power consolidation. In particular, Managua has completed its control over the military and security services. However, the Sandinistas lag in establishing complete single party control and in eliminating vestiges of independent labor, media, and professional groups. Moreover, the Catholic Church has deep roots in Nicaragua and remains the regime's strongest non-military opposition.

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Based on the patterns established by the five Marxist-Leninist regimes, we would expect the Sandinistas to continue to tighten their control over opposition political parties, independent trade unions and professional organizations, and the remaining opposition press. Like some of the regimes we examined, the Sandinistas--trying to minimize internal opposition--are likely to follow a more measured path in centralizing control over the economy and increasing control over private education. On the international front, we would expect the regime to continue to support regional revolutionary causes and seek additional Soviet and Soviet-surrogate ties.

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Nicaragua's Development as a Marxist-Leninist StateThe Indicators

Our analysis of the Nicaraguan revolution is based on the application of 47 indicators (see table) that both measure general progress in consolidating power and the extent to which this consolidation will lead to a Marxist-Leninist regime strongly influenced by the USSR and its surrogates. Five Marxist-Leninist regimes were examined--Cuba, Grenada, Angola, Ethiopia, and South Yemen. To ensure the broader applicability of the indicators, regime selection was influenced by varied geographic location, length of revolutionary process, method of gaining power, and the political and sociological characteristics of these countries. [REDACTED]

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IRAN AS A CONTROL CASE

All revolutionary regimes--regardless of political direction--exhibit general similarities in the consolidation of political control. To help differentiate between revolutionary dynamics per se and those uniquely associated with a Marxist-Leninist movement, we applied our indicators to Iran. The parallel is interesting: Iran mirrors many of the steps the Marxist regimes have taken while adopting an Islamic rather than a Marxist ideology. The similarities in tactics used to consolidate internal control demonstrate the powerful revolutionary dynamics driving all of these regimes, including Nicaragua; the differences, in turn, highlight Marxist-Leninist strategy and the role of the USSR and its surrogates. [REDACTED]

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The indicators were developed out of an iterative process involving the participation of experienced analysts [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] They were arranged under 10 major categories of steps that each of the regimes has taken to consolidate power and firm its relationship with the Soviet bloc. These categories are:

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- o Developing a strong centrally controlled single-party government;
- o Taking control of and expanding the military;
- o Taking control of and strengthening the security and intelligence services;
- o Gaining control of the private sector and developing a centrally controlled and planned economy;

- o Forming new or taking over existing labor movement and mass organizations aimed at groups such as youth, students, and women;
- o Developing a monopoly of the country's media;
- o Increasing control of education systems and using them to promote ideology;
- o Curbing the influence of religious institutions;
- o Exerting control over the population through restriction of civil liberties and intimidation; and
- o Internationally aligning themselves with the Soviet Bloc through international forums and support to other leftist or revolutionary causes. [REDACTED]

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Move to One-Party Government

Internal Activities. In each of the Marxist-Leninist governments studied, the regimes first came to power as part of a broad-based opposition to a previous government. In the cases of Nicaragua, Cuba, Grenada, Ethiopia and Iran the government was viewed as repressive and out of touch; in Angola and South Yemen, the struggle was against colonial rule as well as competing nationalist organizations. The more moderate or dissident members of the new government, however, were soon neutralized (in some cases they became disillusioned and left on their own and in others they were forced out). Only in Nicaragua, Grenada, and in the early days of the Cuban regime were there attempts to develop any semblance of coalition governments before casting off the moderates. Most of the regimes fairly quickly established one-party systems. Nicaragua has not done so, but is moving in that direction. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Iran provides an interesting parallel here: it soon established an official ideology, but it was Islam rather than Marxism. [REDACTED]

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External Activities. In most cases Moscow had little role, either directly or through a pro-Soviet Communist party, prior to the establishment of these regimes. In Cuba and South Yemen, there were Communist parties but neither played a significant role in the revolution; only afterwards were they integrated into the regime. In Ethiopia, the existing Communist movement has been co-opted and neutralized. Grenada did not have a Communist party and the pro-Soviet party in Nicaragua was largely bypassed by Havana. Cuba, however, had long-term ties to Sandinista leaders and played a major role in arming them in the last year of their struggle to attain power. Only in Angola did the USSR provide significant support prior to the regime gaining power. [REDACTED]

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Nonetheless, after the Marxist regimes came to power, party ties with the Soviet Bloc increased; these ties included training of cadres and assistance in reorganizing and strengthening party and bureaucratic structures. For instance, Moscow helped establish a party school in South Yemen. Another important indicator is how Moscow classifies foreign revolutionary movements--it currently regards the ruling parties in Nicaragua, South Yemen, Ethiopia, Angola, (and Grenada before the intervention) as "revolutionary democratic parties"--considered by the USSR as the last stage in development prior to becoming a true Communist party. Only Cuba has an officially recognized ruling Communist Party. [REDACTED]

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Control of Military and Security Services

Internal Activities. Each of the regimes studied either established new or reorganized old military and security services, and moved quickly to strengthen these institutions and put them under firm control, frequently by an extensive purge of personnel. To keep the military and police in line, extensive ideological training programs were developed and political cadres were assigned. With the exception of Ethiopia (basically a military government), the military has been brought under the control of the ruling party. As an additional check on the regular military forces, many of these regimes also established popular militias. [REDACTED]

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External Activities. Each of the Marxist regimes turned to the Soviet Bloc to fulfill their needs for military equipment, training, and advisors. For example, Ethiopia stopped payment in 1976 on US military equipment and signed a military agreement with the USSR. While these regimes may obtain weapons from other sources, their ideological predilections and the attractive financial terms offered by the Bloc countries have made the USSR and Eastern Europe the major suppliers. Soviet and Cuban advisors often play key support roles--providing training, piloting aircraft and assisting in military planning. The Angolan and Ethiopian regimes rely on thousands of Cuban troops to assist in their defense. The East Germans have been the most active in helping regimes train intelligence and security officers, and in strengthening client security organizations--frequently reorganizing them along the lines of the Soviet and East German services. East German advisors frequently hold key positions within these services, particularly in communications security; [REDACTED]

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Exert Economic Controls

Internal Activities. Each of the regimes has taken steps to control the country's economy, but the extent and pace of this activity has varied widely, reflecting a number of factors such as the need to consolidate political power, the preexisting economic structure of the country, and--in most cases--the need

to rely on the West for economic and technical assistance. Although the Grenadian government had plans for additional nationalization and land redistribution, it nationalized only a few companies. Angola, while nationalizing farms and businesses that had been abandoned by the Portuguese, set up joint ownerships with a number of foreign companies, particularly in the vital oil industry. Ethiopia and South Yemen conducted major nationalization programs--particularly of foreign businesses--and land redistribution; a number of state farms and cooperatives have also been formed. Nicaragua has moved to gain greater control of the economy by nationalizing a large share of its industry and controlling banking and investment. The Sandinista regime has also redistributed more than a fifth of the agricultural land, mostly as cooperatives and state farms. Cuba, by comparison, fairly quickly gained control of the private sector, and began moving toward a centrally planned economy. [redacted]

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External Activities. While all of the Marxist regimes have developed closer economic ties to the Soviet Bloc--including trade, credits, technicians, and minor economic aid--all with the exception of Cuba still rely heavily on the West for trade and assistance. This is partly due to the inability and unwillingness of Moscow and its allies to provide other countries with the high level of economic assistance it provides Cuba. [redacted]

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Mass Organizations and the Media

Internal Activities. All of the regimes made efforts to take over existing labor organizations or develop new ones under strict party control. In Nicaragua, the Sandinista Workers Central has largely replaced the once powerful independent unions. Similarly, these regimes have either penetrated existing mass organizations or formed new ones aimed at such societal groups as women, youth, and students. Only Nicaragua (and Grenada during its short tenure) has not completely eliminated or outlawed independent mass groups. All of the regimes established monopoly control of the media, and Nicaragua is close to this point now. The Sandinistas control the nation's two television networks, and heavily censor the main opposition press La Prensa. [redacted]

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External Activities. Each of the regimes surveyed established closer ties with the Communist Bloc nations in the areas of labor, mass organizations, and the media. East Germany has been particularly active in training journalists and providing equipment, but the USSR and Cuba (especially in Latin America) have also been active. [redacted]

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Education and Religion Control

Internal Activities. The Sandinistas, like the Marxist-Leninist regimes we examined, have increased the level of ideological content in the education system and have conducted Cuban-style literacy campaigns as a means of indoctrinating

adults and youths. In Nicaragua, however, efforts to control the educational curriculum and increase Marxist ideology have been impeded as the Catholic Church has fought to preserve autonomy of church-run schools. In fact, only Cuba and Ethiopia have been successful in closing all private schools. [redacted]

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The extent of regime efforts to control religious institutions has depended on the degree to which these institutions provide meaningful political opposition. In Angola, South Yemen, and to some extent Ethiopia, religious institutions did not constitute a major obstacle to the regime. While some controls were exercised, such as banning religious broadcasts, confiscating church property, and restricting foreign ties, religious organizations--except for some fundamentalist groups--have not been attacked. The Nicaraguan regime, on the other hand, is faced with a politically active church that--although it supported the revolution against Somoza--is now considered a major obstacle by the regime; thus the Sandinistas are actively trying to discredit the Catholic Church and split its hierarchy. The Nicaraguan government's promotion of a pro-regime faction of the church, based upon its assertion that Marxism and Christianity are compatible, is unique among the cases studied.

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External Activities. All of the Marxist regimes use Communist Bloc educational materials and equipment and send large numbers of students to the Bloc countries for academic training. While many go to the USSR and Eastern Europe, Cuba also hosts large numbers of African and Latin students. For example, there are four high schools in Cuba specifically set up for some 2,400 Ethiopian students. In addition, Cuban teachers have been sent to these countries--some 2,000 to Nicaragua. There is little evidence of Communist Bloc involvement in domestic religious problems, although Cuban advisors monitored the situation in Grenada [redacted]

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Social Control

All of the regimes surveyed restricted civil liberties and used intimidation and harassment to discourage opposition. A favorite tool has been the development of revolutionary defense committees--in Nicaragua called Sandinista Defense Committees -- to spread revolutionary ideals as well as monitor citizens for signs of anti-revolutionary behavior. In some cases, such as the kebeles in Ethiopia, they have gotten out of hand and caused widespread terror. Police and security forces have also played a major role in suppressing opposition. [redacted]

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International Alignment

In the international arena, all of the Marxist regimes have aligned themselves more closely with Soviet foreign policy and have supported Soviet positions--and generally opposed the US--in

international forums; all have actively participated in international Communist front organizations such as the World Peace Council and the World Federation of Democratic Youth. All of the revolutionary regimes, including Iran, have supported foreign revolutionary causes--particularly in neighboring countries. Cuba has been the most active in this area, particularly in the early days of its own revolution. Angola has supported liberation groups in southern Africa; South Yemen has in the past supported insurgents in North Yemen and elsewhere; Ethiopia has supported liberation groups, particularly in Africa; Grenada helped leftists in the Caribbean; and Nicaragua has been active in supporting revolutionary groups in neighboring countries. The USSR and many of the other Bloc countries have signed friendship treaties with Angola, Ethiopia, and South Yemen. While the Soviets have refrained from signing friendship treaties in the three Latin countries we studied, East Germany signed a friendship treaty with Cuba in 1980. The Soviets have access to naval, air, and military facilities in Cuba--the only one of the three Latin American countries--as well as Ethiopian, Angola, and South Yemen.

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Implications

The observed pattern of developments for those Marxist-Leninist states which have been in existence longer than Nicaragua suggest a number of steps that the Sandinista government will attempt to undertake in the future. The pace and vigor of each of the following activities, however, will likely depend on a number of factors including domestic resistance, concern over international reaction (principally from the United States), and degree of external support from the USSR and Cuba. Expected initiatives include:

- o Continued consolidation of political control, making it increasingly difficult for opposition groups and parties to operate and co-opting those that participate in the loyal opposition.
- o Over the longer haul, establishing a one-party regime with Marxism-Leninism as the official ideology.
- o Tighter controls of independent trade unions and professional organizations.
- o Actions to gain total control over all communications media such as adopting a more restrictive media law that would set the legal basis for state control.
- o Initiatives to increase control over business while stopping far short of complete abolition of the private sector.

- o Additional attempts to control the ideological content of education, such as additional curriculum changes in Catholic schools and discrediting outspoken clergy.
- o Efforts to increase ties with the USSR, Cuba, and other Communist countries--particularly in the military area--as a way of increasing the regime's chances of survival. For instance, after the Sandinistas consolidate control, they may seek friendship treaties with Bloc states.
- o Continued assistance to revolutionary movements--particularly in the region--in the form of training, sanctuary, logistics, and political support.

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CONSOLIDATION OF MARXIST-LENINIST REGIME POWER: AN INDICATORS APPROACH^a

Marxist-Leninist Regime Time in Power	Nicaragua 5 1/2 yrs	Cuba 26 yrs	S. Yemen 17 yrs	Ethiopia 10 yrs	Angola 9 yrs	Grenada 4 1/2 yrs	Iran ^b 6 yrs
Move to One-Party Government							
Internal Activities:							
o Take power as a broad-based opposition to previous government.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
o Neutralize or eliminate moderate or dissident factions.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
o Enhance central party control of government.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
o Suppress, harass, or co-opt other political parties.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
o Establish one-party system.	○	●	●	●	●	●	●
o Adopt Marxism-Leninism as official ideology.	○	●	●	●	●	○	○
External Activities:							
o Communist Bloc party ties, training of cadres.	●	●	●	●	●	●	○
o Communist Bloc assistance in reorganizing and advising party/government.	●	●	●	●	●	●	○
o Soviet designation as vanguard, revolutionary democratic party.	●	●	●	●	●	●	○
o Soviet acceptance as Communist party.	○	●	○	○	○	○	○

^aFilled circles indicate steps taken by regimes; open circles are steps not completed.

^bIran was examined as a means of differentiating general totalitarian traits from those unique to Marxist-Leninist movements.

Marxist-Leninist Regime	Nicaragua	Cuba	S. Yemen	Ethiopia	Angola	Grenada	Iran
Time in Power	5 1/2 yrs	26 yrs	17 yrs	10 yrs	9 yrs	4 1/2 yrs	6 yrs
Take Control of Military							
Internal Activities:							
o Establish new or reorganize and expand old military services.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
o Conduct political training, assign political commissars.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
o Put under party control.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
External Activities							
o Receive major military equipment, advisers, training from Communist Bloc.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
o Have large number of foreign Communist combat troops in-country.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
Take Control of Security Services							
Internal Activities:							
o Establish new or reorganize and expand old security and intelligence services.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
o Put under tight control.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
External Activities:							
o Receive equipment, training, and assistance in organizing/managing intelligence/security services from East Germany or other Communist country.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
o Develop closer security/intelligence relations (liaison) with Bloc services.	o	o	o	o	o	o	o

Marxist-Leninist Regime	Nicaragua	Cuba	S. Yemen	Ethiopia	Angola	Grenada	Iran
Time in Power	5 1/2 yrs	26 yrs	17 yrs	10 yrs	9 yrs	4 1/2 yrs	6 yrs
Exert Economic Controls							
Internal Activities:							
o Nationalize some key companies (e.g., utilities), initiate land reform/redistribution program.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
o Major nationalization and/or joint ownership of industries.	•	•	•	•	•	0	•
o Major land redistribution; formation of co-ops and State-controlled farms.	•	•	•	•	•	0	0
o Centralize control and planning of all significant means of production.	0	•	0	•	0	0	0
External Activities:							
o Increase economic ties with Communist Bloc (trade, credits, technicians).	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
o Become reliant on USSR for economic survival.	0	•	0	0	0	0	0
Form or Take Over Labor/Mass Organizations							
Internal Activities:							
o Penetrate existing or form new labor and other mass organizations (youth, women, etc).	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
o Tighten party control.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
o Prohibit independent mass organizations.	0	•	•	•	•	0	•
External Activities:							
o Increase ties with mass organizations in Bloc countries (exchanges, training).	•	•	•	•	•	•	0

Marxist-Leninist Regime Time in Power	Nicaragua 5 1/2 yrs	Cuba 26 yrs	S. Yemen 17 yrs	Ethiopia 10 yrs	Angola 9 yrs	Grenada 4 1/2 yrs	Iran 6 yrs
Develop Media Monopoly							
Internal Activities:							
o Censor, harass, and/or close newspapers and other independent media.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
o Put all media under central party/government control.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
External Activities:							
o Receive Communist Bloc journalist training, equipment, news services.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Increase Control of Education							
Internal Activities:							
o Increase ideological content and political control of education thru curriculum, literacy campaigns, and teachers.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
o Close private schools, and put all school systems under direct party/government controls.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
External Activities:							
o Receive Communist Bloc academic/political training, teachers, materials, equipment.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

Marxist-Leninist Regime	Nicaragua	Cuba	S. Yemen	Ethiopia	Angola	Grenada	Iran
Time in Power	5 1/2 yrs	26 yrs	17 yrs	10 yrs	9 yrs	4 1/2 yrs	6 yrs
Curb Religious Influence							
o Reduce influence of religion through control or co-optation.	•	•	•	•	•	•	0
o Harass clergy and laity, including removing religious leaders.	•	•	0	•	0	0	0
o Gain effective control (major church closings, expulsions, discrimination against churchgoers) of religious institutions.	0	•	0	0	0	0	0
Exert Social Control							
o Use intimidation, harassment to discourage opposition (thru defense committees, police, etc.)	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
o Restrict civil liberties (right to strike, freedom of speech, assembly).	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
o Use widespread terror tactics to thwart internal opposition (torture, executions).	0	0 ^a	•	•	0	0	•
Alignment with Soviet Bloc							
o Conduct high level exchanges/meetings with Communist Bloc leaders.	•	•	•	•	•	•	0
o Participate in international Communist front organizations.	•	•	•	•	•	•	0
o Support the Soviet Union against the United States in international fora.	•	•	•	•	•	•	0
o Provide support to other leftist or revolutionary groups.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

^aImmediately after Castro came to power, however, there were as many as 2,000 executions of people judged to have committed atrocities under the Batista regime.

Marxist-Leninist Regime	Nicaragua	Cuba	S. Yemen	Ethiopia	Angola	Grenada	Iran
Time in Power	5 1/2 yrs	26 yrs	17 yrs	10 yrs	9 yrs	4 1/2 yrs	6 yrs
International Alignment (continued)							
<i>o Sign Friendship Treaty with USSR or other Bloc country.</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>o Allow Soviet access to naval/air/facilities.</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

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